

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGUI 00085 121625Z
ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9734

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E.O.11652: N/A
TAGS: EINV, PFOR, CT, US
SUBJ: GT&E PAYMENT PROBLEMS

1. THE LOCAL GT&E REP HAS INFORMED THE EMBASSY OF A TELEGRAM SENT FROM GT&E HEADQUARTERS TO PTT MINISTER BOUBA ON JANUARY 5, 1978. THIS CABLE SIGNED BY GT&E DIRECTOR CARVIN AND VICE PRESIDENT EDGAR, INDICATES THAT IF ARREARAGES OF \$117,835 OWED FOR TURN-ON AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS ARE NOT PAID BY JANUARY 15, GT&E PERSONNEL WILL BE WITHDRAWN FROM CAE. IT ALSO ASKS THAT DIRECTOR IMPLIED THREATS AGAINST GT&E PERSONNEL BE STOPPED. FINALLY, CABLE PROPOSES CONFERENCE BETWEEN BOUBA AND GT&E OFFICIALS EITHER IN U.S. OR ITALY.

2. COMMENT: THIS TELEGRAM SETS STAGE FOR POSSIBLE MAJOR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GT&E AND GOCAE. FIRST EMPLOYEE, AMERICAN CITIZEN MCSORLEY, IS SCHEDULED TO DEPART JANUARY 17. GOCAE WILL THEN HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER TO PAY UP, LET HIM GO, OR DETAIN HIM ON GROUNDS THAT GT&E HAS NOT FULFILLED ITS CONTRACT. UNFORTUNATELY LOCAL GT&E REPS HAVE TAKEN NO FOLLOW-UP ACTION WITH REGARD TO TELEGRAM AND DO NOT EVEN KNOW IF BOUBA HAS SEEN IT. SINCE BOUBA IS TRAVELING AND DECISION WILL BE TAKEN BY EMPEROR, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE. WE HAVE SUGGESTED THAT GT&E REPS ATTEMPT TO FIND OUT WHETHER BOUBA OR SOME OTHER INTERIM PTT MINISTER IS

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AWARE OF MESSAGE. IN CURRENT RELATIVELY GOOD POLITICAL CLIMATE BETWEEN U.S. AND CAE, WE DO NOT THINK BOKASSA WILL WANT TO PROVOKE A CRISIS. HOWEVER, THERE IS NOT MUCH MONEY IN THE TILL, AND IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW THE GOCAE CAN COME UP WITH THE REQUIRED SUM BY NEXT TUESDAY. HENCE IT MAY DECIDE TO REFUSE MCSORLEY PERMISSION TO DEPART. AT THAT POINT ISSUE WILL ESCALATE AND EMBASSY MAY BECOME DIRECTLY INVOLVED.

3. IN OUR VIEW GIVEN LONG-STANDING AND INTRACTABLE PAYMENTS PROBLEMS WHICH GT&E HAS ENCOUNTERED AND ON ITS SIDE GOCAE FRUSTRATIONS WITH GT&E'S INABILITY TO GET EVEN SMALL SECTIONS OF MICROWAVE SYSTEM FUNCTIONING SMOOTHLY, SOME FORM OF HIGH-LEVEL NEGOTIATION IS GOING TO BE NEEDED. DISCUSSIONS WITH BOUBA ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND WE HAVE STRONGLY RECOMMENDED TO LOCAL GT&E REPS THAT GT&E CONSIDER SENDING SENIOR OFFICIAL, PRESUMABLY VP EDGAR, TO BANGUI TO MEET WITH BOKASSA IN ATTEMPT TO IRON OUT DIFFICULTIES. SUCH A VISIT WOULD ALSO, FROM USG'S OF VIEW, PROBABLY HELP TO MOVE ALONG RESCHEDULING AGREEMENT WITH EX-IM.

4. WITH REGARD TO QUESTION OF THREATS, THIS APPEARS TO AMOUNT TO REPEATED CHARGE BY BOUBA THAT OUTAGES ON LINK FROM BANGUI TO BERSNGO AMOUNT TO SABOTAGE AND THAT SABOTAGE IS A SERIOUS MATTER ON CAE. THIS WAS A THEME BOKASSA USED WHEN HE ASKED THAT DEMERS BE WITHDRAWN (77 BANGUI 2221). WE DO NOT THINK LOCAL GT&E PERSONNEL ARE IN ANY PHYSICAL DANGER.
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